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ABSTRACT

This document highlights the practices of companies in rural areas that have successfully connected workplace experiences to classroom learning through school-to-careers partnerships. First, the following fundamental components of school-to-careers are explained: school-based learning; work-based learning; and connecting activities. The next section explains the benefits of school-to-careers to students (higher academic achievement, reduced dropout rate, better attendance, and better college preparation) and to the business community (reduced recruitment costs, reduced training costs, reduced turnover, and increased productivity). The special economic and geographic challenges faced by rural communities wishing to implement school-to-careers programs are discussed. The remainder of the document profiles the following businesses that have managed to overcome the identified challenges: (1) JLG Industries, McConnelsburg, Pennsylvania; (2) State Security Bank, New Hampton, Iowa; (3) Schlagel, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts; (4) Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Lawton, Oklahoma; and (5) Iowa Public Television, Johnston, Iowa. The profiles illustrate the following best practices: (1) encourage educators into the workplace; (2) pool community resources; (3) bring the company workplace to school; (4) use technology to enhance learning; and (5) partner with employers from urban areas. Each profile includes a company address and contact person. A list of addresses of seven resource organizations and a glossary are included. (Contains 14 references.) (MN)

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The Rural Challenge

National Employer Leadership Council

NELC

Helping Create Tomorrow's Workforce

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The National Employer Leadership Council, an initiative of the National Alliance of Business, is a business membership organization dedicated to expanding and enhancing employer involvement in School-to-Careers. The NELC advocates and supports School-to-Careers initiatives combining classroom courses with real-life learning to ensure all students meet high standards, and therefore, are prepared for continuing education and the cutting edge jobs of the 21st Century. NELC members and the NELC Leadership Board of senior business executives are committed to sustaining the positive changes in teaching and learning taking place across the country as a result of School-to-Careers.

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Introduction

Across the country, employers from a variety of industries are supporting School-to-Careers as a vehicle to improve academic achievement. School-to-Careers has brought together employers, educators, students, and community leaders to provide a coordinated series of activities that offers students the opportunity to use their academic understandings and abilities to a variety of settings.

Best Practices in School-to-Careers:Rural Issues highlights companies in rural areas that overcome special challenges in connecting workplace experiences to classroom learning.

What is School-to-Careers?

School-to-Careers is a series of activities designed to motivate students to excel academically. With help from teachers and businesspeople, students apply their academic learning to real-world tasks and tackle workplace challenges that build on classroom assignments and tests. Three fundamental components make up School-to-Careers activities:

- School-Based Learning - classroom instruction based on high academic standards.
- Work-Based Learning - mentoring and work experience at job sites.
- Connecting Activities - courses connecting classroom and workplace learning.

Employers agree that School-to-Careers is not a means of diverting students from academics towards the workplace. Rather, School-to-Careers is a strategy that provides students with special opportunities to achieve at their highest potential by challenging students to think critically and understand how subject matter relates to varied settings.

School-to-Careers provides a framework for major stakeholders - schools, employers, and civic organizations - to engage all students in such contextualized learning. While the models for such an education take different forms depending on the stakeholders' role, all focus on raising student achievement.

Making the Case: Employer Benefits of School-to-Careers

Employers who provide students with work-based learning opportunities recognize that these experiences are valuable for students. Recent studies of School-to-Careers programs in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York demonstrate that these experiences enhance student achievement and preparation for college, as well as encourage students to take more advanced classes:

- **Higher academic achievement** - Studies indicate that in Philadelphia, 29.2 percent of students in a School-to-Careers program had a grade point average of 3.0 and above, compared with 19.8 percent of the general student population.
- **Reduced dropout rate** - In Philadelphia, just 3.4 percent of students in School-to-Careers programs dropped out of school, compared with 11.5 percent of the general student population.
- **Better attendance** - The attendance rate for Philadelphia students in School-to-Careers programs was 87.5 percent, compared with the district average of 78.8 percent.
- **Better college preparation** - In Boston, Jobs for the Future reveals that 78 percent of students in the ProTech School-to-Work program went directly to college, compared with the national average of 62 percent.

High achieving, well-educated, dependable, motivated students are more likely to become the professionals that employers need to meet business challenges. Involvement in high quality School-to-Careers programs, therefore, has significant benefits for the business community.

These include:
- Reduced recruitment costs;
- Reduced training costs;
- Reduced turnover; and
- Increased productivity.

These benefits indicate that School-to-Careers initiatives are an intelligent investment of resources that produce strong academic results for students.

The Rural Challenge

In order for a School-to-Careers initiative to be successful, a number of activities must come together. Public relations and marketing efforts must be carefully coordinated to maximize parental, student, business, and teacher support. Transportation and labor laws must be researched to ensure adherence to key policies and protections. Staff development and training must be in place to make certain that learning reinforces rigorous academic standards. And, perhaps most importantly, work-based learning experiences must be of high quality to help students master their academic skills.

Under any circumstances, building an effective School-to-Careers partnership can be challenging. But the significant economic and geographic challenges that rural communities face can make this task even more daunting. According to the Rural School Community Trust, rural America is far poorer than metropolitan areas as a whole, and nearly as poor as central cities. Of the 250 poorest counties in America, 244 are rural. As such, many rural communities often don't have the funds necessary to carry out School-to-Careers partnerships.

Rural communities' geographic isolation also makes School-to-Careers activities a challenge to implement. The distances between and within communities are often great, and many areas lack public transportation. Even when areas do have access to public transit, long bus rides diminish the amount of time students can spend studying outside of school, while high transportation costs take away from funds designated for instruction.

In addition, because school funding is often tied to student enrollment, rural schools often lack the financial resources to support School-to-Careers initiatives. Professional isolation and lower salaries often make recruitment and retention of rural teachers, principals, and administrators difficult.

Despite these odds, a growing number of employers are building effective School-to-Careers partnerships to increase student achievement in rural areas.

This booklet highlights five of these businesses:

1. **JLG Industries**, McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania
2. **Security State Bank**, New Hampton, Iowa
3. **Schlagel Inc**, Cambridge, Minnesota
4. **Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company**, Lawton, Oklahoma
5. **Iowa Public Television**, Johnston, Iowa

Encourage Educators Into the Workplace

Research consistently shows that students who experience quality teaching achieve at higher levels than students who are taught by less effective teachers. A 1991 study by Ferguson attributed nearly half the variation in test scores between White and African American students to differences in teacher quality. A1996 report by Sanders and Rivers reported that, after three years of ineffective teachers, students in Tennessee scored at levels that were less than half of those of their peers who benefited from more effective teachers. And, according to a 1998 report by Bain & Company, students of top teachers in Boston Public Schools produced gains in mathematics, while those with less effective teachers showed no growth.

Teachers' level of content knowledge is also linked to student achievement. Eighth grade students of teachers who had majored or minored in mathematics scored 40% higher on the mathematics portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than eighth grade students of teachers who had majors or minors in other fields. The nationwide shortage of qualified math teachers - those with a major in mathematics - is more severe in rural areas. The result is a significant number of students whose teachers are under prepared to be instructional leaders in fields to which they are sometimes assigned to teach. A further complication is the shortage of opportunities to help such out-of-field teachers improve their knowledge. Data from a U.S. Department of Education Study shows that teachers receive an average of just eight hours of professional development each year.

Recognizing that higher student achievement is the likely outcome, many rural School-to-Careers initiatives focus on professional development opportunities for teachers.

JLG Industries, McConnellsburg, PA

JLG Industries, the world's leading producer of mobile aerial work platforms, recognizes the importance of improving student achievement. The company is situated in a town with only 1,106 residents. According to the local Chamber of Commerce, approximately 34 percent of adults 18 years and older lack a college degree (one of the highest rates in Pennsylvania) of which 13 percent possess less than an eighth grade education. The company has decided to reverse these depressing statistics by focusing on teacher quality:

- Educator in the Workplace Programs: During the summer months, JLG Industries provides opportunities for local high school teachers to see how academic subject matter is applied in a workplace setting. Teachers rotate among different departments within the company during their one-week industrial experience. Moreover, to help ensure that teachers and workers at JLG Industries continually improve their skills, the company launched JLG University. JLG University primarily focuses on the development of all JLG team members as well as providing a forum for the Company's customers and suppliers to further strengthen their skills. This convenient resource could have a profound impact on the community.

- Employees in the Classroom Initiatives: JLG Industries also helps connect academic subject matter to real work contexts by visiting classrooms sometimes to explain their work, sometimes with hands-on-demonstrations. For example, students interested in engineering meet with computer engineers to learn how 3-D computer aided drafting systems are critical to developing blueprints and other basic manufacturing tasks.

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Pool Community Resources

With geographic and economic challenges prevalent in rural communities, many businesses build relationships with other community members to pool resources to establish a broader base of knowledge in support of education. Pooling resources also offers educators and businesses a chance to collaborate with each other to improve student achievement.

Schlagel, Inc.
Cambridge, Minnesota

Located in Central Minnesota, Schlagel, Inc. a sheet metal manufacturer with a workforce of only 80 employees, demonstrates the important role that leveraging community resources can play in School-to-Careers activities.

Recognizing the need for the regional populace to develop core skills, Schlagel, Inc. mobilized government agencies, school districts, nonprofit organizations, and employers to form the East Central Minnesota Workforce Partnership. The partnership ensures that present and future workforce needs are met by helping businesses provide high school students with work-based and contextual learning experiences.

Under the aegis of the East Central Minnesota Workforce Partnership, Schlagel, Inc. offers several registered youth apprenticeships and provides extensive academic exploration activities for students. Students take advantage of basic job shadowing activities. The company also supports a pilot project in academic mentoring to help young people understand how their academic strengths and interests are translated into the workplace.

The East Central Minnesota Workforce Partnership also enables the company to work directly with parents, teachers, and other school administrators. Schlagel, Inc. has hosted plant tours for these partners and has offered teachers internships at the company.

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Bring the Workplace to the School

Employers recognize that work-based learning can be a powerful tool to help students achieve at higher levels. At the same time however, rural employers often lack the human, financial, and physical resources to provide students with the opportunity to apply their academic learning to real-world tasks. Instead of relying on other organizations to provide contextual learning opportunities to students, many rural businesses have decided to promote contextual learning by bringing the workplace to the classroom. This proactive approach enables business to help raise the level of knowledge of all young people while not overwhelming already scarce resources.

Security State Bank
New Hampton, Iowa

Three years ago, Richard Kriener, Vice President of Security State Bank, was concerned about the mathematical and financial literacy skills of his community. He worried that youth lacked strong computational skills and that members of the community had little interest in pursuing careers in financial services.

Kriener hypothesized that young students would become more mathematically literate if they received hands-on opportunities to see how addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division apply to a savings institution. Since limited resources and staff prevented Kriener from bringing students into Security State Bank, he opted to open and operate a bank within a local public school. In 1999, the "Giant Piggy Bank," a partnership between Security State Bank and the New Hampton Elementary School, was formed.

Every Tuesday morning, New Hampton elementary students have the opportunity to deposit their money into an account at the "Giant Piggy Bank". When opening an account, students receive a passbook and money purse. They also receive a bookmark, which gives tips on how to save money.

Elementary school students run all bank operations. Nine fourth, fifth, and sixth graders are chosen to be bank tellers. These tellers receive practical opportunities to improve their computation skills by monitoring students' withdrawals and deposits into their savings accounts. In addition, students are taught how to calculate their potential monthly savings based on their weekly deposits into the bank. To make certain that students are applying these computational skills correctly, they check each teller's calculation and handling of the money.

Nine students are also selected to serve on the "Giant Piggy Bank" Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meet once a month for a breakfast meeting at the New Hampton School. The board focuses on ways to improve customer service and operations as well as ideas to better market the "Giant Piggy Bank."

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Use Technology To Enhance Learning

Employers can help rural communities overcome their geographic isolation by helping educators gain access to technology and thus access to rich and diverse curriculum. Today, technology such as the Internet enables students to obtain information in a matter of seconds. Fiber-optic networks allow students and teachers hundreds of miles apart to interact dynamically as if in the same room, saving time and the cost of travel.

Undoubtedly, implementing technology in rural areas can be difficult. Laying fiber-optic cables across remote and long distances can be expensive. However, many states are offering new incentive programs to help rural communities overcome access problems. In Kentucky for example, there is a statewide initiative that guarantees broadband access to every county. Similar programs exist in Iowa and North Dakota. Employers are poised to take advantage of the power of technology in various ways.

Iowa Public Television
Johnston, Iowa

Headquartered in Johnston, Iowa, Iowa Public Television (IPTV) has launched a comprehensive School-to-Careers initiative which integrates a Web site, video library, video conferencing and professional development to connect classroom learning to Iowa's workplace.

IPTV's School-to-Careers Web site www.careers.iptv.org is dedicated to ensuring that students and teachers get a first hand look at the academic, technical, and general job requirements of careers across the state. Central to the website is a searchable database of more than 200 job profiles. Users can access the database by looking up a keyword, occupation, career pathway, or job topic. For example students interested in media can learn about the various forms of print, radio, and television journalism. In addition, they can read interviews with local reporters, producers, and camera operators to obtain advice on the academic, technical, and professional skills needed to be successful in the industry. They can also view a short clip from the career video library.

The Web site also provides a calendar of video conferencing opportunities offered through the Iowa Communications Network (ICN). This fiber-optic system brings students, educators, and businesses from across the state together via interactive video. The ICN enables students to visit with the career professionals who are featured in the videos. For example, geometry students who struggle with the Pythagorean theorem may interact via the ICN with a professional who illustrates how the Pythagorean theorem is used in the workplace.

Professional development classes conducted by IPTV education staff offer practical models for integrating academic and vocational curricula across varying grade levels and multiple disciplines with the School to Careers project. Professional development activities are also offered to teachers in local school districts for credit during the summer.

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Partner with Employers From Urban Areas

Employers in metropolitan areas often are committed to improving student achievement in neighboring rural areas. Often times, these businesses are willing to provide the resources and expertise that are scarce among smaller businesses in rural areas.

Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company
Lawton, Oklahoma

Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company in Lawton, Oklahoma demonstrates its commitment to advancing education in rural areas by providing an extensive internship program to high school students from Cache, Chattanooga, Elgin, Snyder, and Fletcher, Oklahoma. All five of these small farming communities have populations under 20,000 people and less than 25 high school graduates a year.

The Goodyear Tire & Rubber program started the program in 1995 to teach students from rural areas about occupations other than farming. Students in the program are interviewed and recruited through the local Great Plains Vocational-Technical System.

Once accepted into the program, students are assigned a mentor in the engineering, accounting, purchasing, and communications field. These mentors assign projects based on students' academic interests. For example, students in engineering may test electronic circuits, update electrical diagrams, or mix rubber. Students interested in communications may be asked to give PowerPoint presentations or write feature articles on the plant.

Students are expected to complete a minimum of 54 hours at their internship. They keep track of their time spent at the Goodyear plant and report back to their school counselor.

Goodyear's program is designed to improve students' academic achievement. Mentors challenge students to push themselves academically, as well as think critically about their future career choices.

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Resources

For more information about School-to-Careers and rural educational issues contact the following organizations:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston WV 25325
Phone: (800) 624-9120
Web site: www.ael.org/eric/rural.htm

Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory
12500 E. Iliff Avenue
Suite 210
Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: (303) 337-0990
Web site: www.mcrel.org

National Alliance of Business
1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 700
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Web site: www.nab.com

National Employer Leadership Council
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1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 700
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National Rural Education Association
230 Education Bldg
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-0001
Phone: (303) 491-7022
Web site: www.colostate.edu/Orgs/NREA

REAL Enterprises
95 East Dougherty Street
Suite 202, Athens, GA 30603
Phone: (706) 546-9061
Web site: www.realenterprises.org

Rural School Community Trust
Web site: www.ruralchallengepolicy.org

Glossary of Terms

The following terms, used throughout this publication, come from the *NELC's Employer Participation Model*, a guide designed to help employers structure their involvement in School-to-Careers. For additional information please visit the NELC website (www.nelc.org).

Career Awareness

- **Career Talks:** Employers and employees visit students in the classroom to describe how academics relate to the workplace.

- **Career Days/Career Fairs:** Special events held to allow students to meet postsecondary educators, employers and employees, or human resource professionals to learn how academic achievements can apply to potential careers.

- **Worksite Tours:** Students visit the worksite, talk with employees, observe the workplace activities, and link to academic learning.

Career Exploration

- **Job Shadowing:** A student follows an employee at a company location to learn how academic skills translate into a particular occupation or industry.

- **Jobs Rotations**: At a worksite, students transfer among a number of positions and tasks that require different skills and responsibilities to gain a broader spectrum of understanding of academic skills.

Career Preparation

- **Internships:** Students work for an employer for a specified period of time to link how classroom learning applies to a particular industry or occupation. Students' workplace activities may include special summer projects, a sample of tasks from different jobs, or tasks from a single occupation. These may or may not include financial compensation.

- **Apprenticeship**
  Youth Apprenticeship: A multi-year program that combines school- and work-based learning in a specific occupational area or occupational cluster and is designed to lead directly into either a related postsecondary program, entry-level job, or registered apprenticeship program. Youth Apprenticeships may or may not include financial compensation.

- **Apprenticeship (Registered):** Registered apprenticeship programs meet specific federally-approved standards designed to safeguard the welfare of apprentices. The programs are registered with the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training (BAT), U.S. Department of Labor, or one of 27 State Apprenticeship Agencies of Councils approved by BAT. Apprenticeships are relationships between an employer and employee during which the worker, or apprentice, learns an occupation in a structured program sponsored jointly by employers and labor unions or operated by employers and employee associations.

- **Mentoring:** Employee(s) who possess the skills and knowledge to be mastered by a student, and who instructs the student, critiques the performance of the student, challenges the student to perform well, and works in consultation with teachers or youth organizations and the employer of the student.

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Building on the NELC Agenda

The National Employer Leadership Council is an initiative of the National Alliance of Business. Dedicated to expanding and enhancing employer involvement in School-to-Careers, the NELC advocates and supports School-to-Careers initiatives combining classroom courses with real-life learning to ensure all students meet high standards, and are prepared for continuing education and the cutting-edge jobs of the 21st century. NELC members and the NELC Leadership Board of senior business executives are committed to sustaining the positive changes in teaching and learning taking place across the country as a result of School-to-Careers.

The NELC recognizes that as the knowledge economy continues to experience rapid change in the nature of work and the type of jobs available, an increasing number of employers, educators, and community organizations are striving for a seamless education system that equips individuals with knowledge that can be upgraded continuously. These systems will be based on defining and articulating strategies for building "knowledge supply chains" that help align education and training activities directly with employer demand.

The development of these systems requires an understanding of how skill needs link to skill development. The employer community and, as a result, the NELC, advocates for national, state, and local education and training systems built on four common principles:

- **A clear process to determine and understand employer demand.** This includes regular and ongoing information on the foundational ("soft") and academic skills required of all workers, as well as the occupation- and industry-specific skills required in a variety of jobs.
- **Benchmarks and standards of competency based directly on this employer demand.** Programs must measure what individuals can do in order to ensure that employer needs will be met.
- **Certification and credentialing of these skills** and abilities that are valued and used by employers in the hiring, re-training, and education investment processes.
- **Building curricula and programs** designed to develop these competencies and leading to these certificates and credentials.

To find out more, contact: National Employer Leadership Council, c/o National Alliance of Business, 1201 New York Avenue, NW Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005, Phone: (800) 360-NELC, E-mail: nelc@nelc.org

The work of the NELC is supported by the employer community and the National School-to-Work Office, a joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor.

National Employer Leadership Council

NELC

Helping Create
Tomorrow's Workforce

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